

*Tested, Tried and
Refined*

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The trials we face on a daily basis are nothing more than a 'refining process' to bring us closer to God. We will take a Hebrew word, '**Tsaraph,**' and explore how it is used in other areas of the Old Testament. We will also go through the lives of Joseph and Gideon, heroes of faith, and see how this word is used in connection with them – where it came, the time, and how God 'tested' them to see if they would be obedient to His word by faith before using them for His purposes.

Psalm 105:17

He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant:

You know the story of Joseph, Jacob's favorite son. Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colors, which made his other brothers very jealous of the relationship and love their father had for Joseph. Joseph had dreams, which showed his brothers, and even his own father, bowing down to him, thus showing that he would be put in a capacity of leadership where they would have to take his words as law, as commandment, and obey it. Of course, the brothers did not want to be part of that, and given the opportunity they sought to kill him. But God had a hand in protecting Joseph from being killed; although, He did allow him to be bound and sold as a slave and sent to Egypt where he served under his master, Potiphar, faithfully. But Potiphar's wicked wife had other plans for Joseph; she lied about his intentions and Joseph wound up in prison. Joseph was sent by God but wound up in slavery!

Psalm 105:18

Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron:

'He was laid in iron.' A better translation of that phrase is 'his soul came into iron.' His very being was unbreakable because he kept his faith and trust in God's Word.

God knew exactly when Joseph's soul came into iron. He knew exactly when to start the process of setting up Joseph in a foreign land to be ruler. This allowed not only Egypt, but also the nations surrounding Egypt in the then-known world, to survive through the horrible famine that would have wiped out all of Abraham's seed if He hadn't sent a man.

Psalm 105:19-21

Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance:

He made him second to none, except to Pharaoh. Only Pharaoh had a higher position in Egypt. Joseph could do whatever he wanted, to whomever he wanted to do it to, and no one could say a word. But he didn't get there overnight. The iron had to enter into his soul when the Word of the Lord 'tried' him. Circle that word "tried." The Word of the Lord 'tried' him. 'Tsaraph' is the Hebrew word used here and indicates 'test' or 'to refine' as silver is refined. How do you refine silver? Well, first of all you have to separate it. The ore is heated up, and when it is at high-enough temperatures the lead is dissolved and silver is separated out. Silver is separated from the ore and the lead because the high heat, the furnace so to speak, has caused that separation. This is the first process of refining silver and 'Tsaraph' is the Hebrew Word to describe this. The Word of the Lord, 'Tsaraph,' tested and refined him. He went through a testing period. God had sent him, but Joseph still had the opportunity, to turn against God if only Satan could get hold of his mind by having his mind, and his person, focused on the circumstances that had led up to this moment. Satan knew what was taking place; and his goal, his mode of operation, was to break down Joseph so God's promise could not be fulfilled. However, Satan was *not* successful.

The iron entered into Joseph's soul and he was tested, he was 'Tsaraph', he was refined, and he was proven. When the set time came, and most of you know the story of Joseph, he was allowed out of prison to interpret Pharaoh's dream about the upcoming famine that was going to devastate all the kingdoms surrounding that area – if it wasn't for Joseph and how he interpreted those dreams! And that interpretation came to Joseph through God, by God. It wasn't Joseph's own doing. He just became an instrument, a willing vessel to be tested and proved by God,

'Tsaraph'. The Old Testament and New Testament heroes of faith also went through the same testing and refining in the way God had set for them. He allowed people who were being tested to see what they were made of – if they were going to fall by the wayside or if they would press closer to God and by faith move forward, trusting that God had everything under control, not only for them as individuals, but as in the case of Joseph and Gideon, for the whole nation of Israel.

Gideon: Man of Fear to Hero of Faith

When we read the book of Judges we notice that the children of Israel would keep falling back to worshipping false idols and doing evil in the sight of the Lord. Then they would plead, cry, and beg God to enter back in and take care of their enemies, and God would do it! They would then stay faithful for a while, but would fall back in the same old trap and become evil in the sight of the Lord, going through this cycle over and over again.

Judges 6:1-2 – And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

They were running for their lives, folks. They couldn't live a peaceful life. They couldn't set up camp or set up their household because they knew their enemies would come in periodically and destroy everything they had established. Added to that, they were fearful for their own lives. So they wound up living in dens in the mountains, and in caves and strongholds.

Judges 6:3

And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

When the Israelites tried to plant, when it came to harvest time, the Midianites, Amalekites, and the children of the East came and took everything they had.

Judges 6:4

And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

The Midianites, Amalekites, and the children of the East came up periodically, some scholars think once a year, but they came up with their own cattle and their own tents to stay a while as they depleted the ground. There were so many of them they were everywhere to be seen, like grasshoppers for multitude. Everything was harvested and destroyed as they took everything they could take from the children of Israel. They landed upon the Israelites to deplete them till there was no sustenance in the land. They took their animals; they took their livestock, the sheep, ox, and ass, and left the children of Israel with nothing. The only thing the Israelites had to go back to, year in and year out, for 7 years, was back to the cave and back to the dens, in fear of their very existence.

Judges 6:5-10 – For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the LORD. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD because of the Midianites, that the LORD sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the Gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice.

Then Israel cried unto the Lord; it took them 7 years to do it! They could have cried the first year and I think the Lord would have responded, but it took 7 years before they could realize their ways and recognize that their only source of hope and salvation was the Lord. God will send a deliverer. Fear not the Gods of the Amorites; fear not those make-believe, fake, made-up gods that is not the Elohim God, the mighty God – God who is the creator of all things. Those were just pretenders. I am the true God. The prophet says this, not Gideon. In most cases in the Old Testament He sends a prophet to deliver His message prior to deliverance.

Judges 3:1-2

Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;

God allowed these nations to be there to prove Israel, to see if they would obey Him or disobey Him, but they chose not to obey him.

Judges 6:11

And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

This is how we are introduced to Gideon. He was threshing wheat by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. Basically he was doing it in fear, just trying to squeeze out another meal to survive. I recommend the book written by Dr. Gene Scott on Gideon because it is very well written and goes into quite a lot of explanation on the vocabulary of doubt used in verses 13, 14.

Judges 6:12

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

As Dr. Scott has pointed out, Gideon is not the one 'mighty in valor.' He was just the opposite he was scared spit less. He was not demonstrating any valor; he was just trying to prepare a meal to survive another day. It is the Lord himself who is mighty in valor, or as in the Hebrew, the one that is mighty in 'strength.' Circle the word 'valor.' It should be 'strength.' 'The one that is mighty in strength.' Gideon didn't demonstrate any strength or valor. Like I said, it was just the opposite.

Judges 6:13

And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

There are a lot of "what ifs" here, as my mentor used to say, and all the vocabulary of doubt, 'Why has God forsaken us?'

Judges 6:14

And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

Or, am I not going before you, to fight the battle for you?

Judges 6:15

And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

Gideon gave every excuse why he couldn't live up to what the Lord was asking him to do. He

gave one excuse after another, but the Lord didn't buy it.

Judges 6:16,17

And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me.

I wouldn't want to be in Gideon's shoes. Most of you, who are listening to me, if you are really true to yourself, wouldn't want to be in his shoes either because this was a tall task to ask anyone to perform.

Judges 6:16

And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

What are you saying Lord? ' You shall smite the Midianites 'as one man?' (I would say this might be an angel of the Lord but he might have stopped along the way and changed the message that the Lord had for him), because truly the Lord was not expecting him to fight this battle as one man against a horde, so many people who were looked upon as grasshoppers! How am I going to go against so many, as a man, outnumbered the way we are? Even when they gathered an army of soldiers, further down the story, against the Midianites and Amalekites – the enemies of God's people, they were still outnumbered by a considerable amount of enemy soldiers that came against them. I would have asked for a sign too! I don't know about you, but I haven't yet come to the point in my life where, if I am presented with the same set of circumstances, I wouldn't be doubting that this was really a message from the Lord. It might even be a message from the devil to try to end my life or to try to lead me astray to do something that is really stupid. It does not make any sense that the Lord would deliver in that particular manner! Put flesh and blood on it, and get into the story. Just don't read it, put yourself in Gideon's shoes.

Judges 6:17

And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.

Of course the angel was patient, and he tarried there till Gideon fetched him a present, which was actually an offering, and set it before Him. The sign given by the angel was turning those

unleavened cakes over and setting them on fire, thus consumed the offering of unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed from his sight.

Judges 6:22-23,25

And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O LORD God! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it:

Well, give credit to Gideon! That's all it took to take the next step God was asking him to do; destroy the altars of Baal. Remember, God had told Gideon he would not die! But destroying the altars of Baal was no simple task, and Gideon did it by night because he was scared people would catch him doing it by day. However, everyone knew he had done it, and the people were very angry.

Judges 6:30-32 – Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? he that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning: if he be a God, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath thrown down his altar.

Seven years they had no hope! Then a prophet came by in Judges 6:8 proclaiming to the children of Israel. "Have I not brought you out of Egypt?" thus reminding them of all the great things the Lord had done for them in the past. Is He not the same God in Gideon's time? He had told them not to fear the gods of the Amorites, but they had not been obedient, they had not listened to His voice. They were following the wrong gods, the pretenders, and now they were in their mercy! They did not follow the true God, the God of Israel.'

It is easy to follow a pretender; it is a lot harder to keep your eyes focused on Christ, especially in today's' environment where you have a lot of voices steering you in the wrong direction. This is the problem with denominations. Jesus did not say, "You've got to be a Baptist." Jesus did not

say, "You've got to be a Methodist." Jesus did not say, "You've got to be a Presbyterian." There are numerous people claiming to have the only message Christ delivered. This is incorrect! There is only one true God; and there is only one Jesus Christ. There is only one way you can be saved, and that's through the blood of Jesus Christ. There is only one person you are supposed to have faith in, and that is our true God and Father and His son Jesus Christ. There is only one Word we can claim and hang on to, and that is the Word of God as revealed from Genesis to Revelation. I might read other interesting religious material, but if it does not verify the Word of God it is useless. The Bible is the one thing I know that never changes, and I know man without the inspiration of God through the ages could never have written it. We are still exploring the riches it has today. No one has ever been able to completely explore everything in this Book, the Bible! There are things leaping out today that we have never covered, and it amazes me! I ask the question all the time, "How come I didn't see this before?" However, there are right times and set times for everything.

So, give credit to Gideon. He did what God asked him to do, even though he was so fearful he did it by night. He destroyed the altars of Baal, and yes, the men of the city wanted to kill him, but there was no way God was going to allow that to happen, as it would have meant Him going back on His word. He had told Gideon, "Just be obedient. You will not die. Just be the first in this nation, at this time, to be obedient and see what doesn't come after that!" It is amazing that once you get one person headed in the right direction, it is like a bandwagon. You don't have to go out and preach to everybody on the corner; just let your life be an example. Others will see it. You hear it said so often, "Let your light shine!" Well, yes, let it shine. Let the light be the Word of God working in your life, and others will see it. The Holy Spirit will not dwell in secret; He will not keep you hidden in a closet somewhere. He wants to be in your life, and that will 'show' as you walk your daily life of faith in Him.

In Judges chapter 7, his father gives Gideon a new name, not by the Lord, 'Jerubbaal' meaning "Let Baal contend" and by now Gideon has gathered a following.

Judges 6:33-37 – Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh; who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher, and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali; and they came up to meet them. And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said.

Basically, Gideon is asking God for a fleece, for another sign that he is indeed on the right track and is doing what he is supposed to. This was no small task ahead of him; you would ask for a fleece too, if you were him. It is one thing to destroy an altar of Baal at night, and quite another to come against the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the children of the East. The enemy had numerous soldiers who only had one intention – total annihilation of the children of Israel. So Gideon asked for a fleece and God was gracious and compassionate enough to give him another sign.

Judges 6:39-40 – And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

God gave Gideon another sign to show that He was going to be there with him, that Gideon would lead the Israelites into battle, and that he would not die.

Judges 7:1-2 Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.

Gideon had a group of people now; he had gathered an army. It was a small army compared to the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the children of the East, but nevertheless it was an army and it consisted of 32,000 people. However, God did not want the Israelites to vaunt themselves, or in the Hebrew 'boast,' about the victory that was just around the corner and claim the credit for themselves. He did not want the children of Israel to declare, after they had achieved the victory, that, maybe, God really wasn't behind them at all. Maybe *they* had outsmarted the enemy. He did not want them to boast.

Judges 7:3 – Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

Gideon followed the Old Testament law on how to wage war, as laid down in Deuteronomy; and 10,000 soldiers remained out of the original 32,000 as 22,000 left the scene in fear.

Deuteronomy 20:8 – And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.

God gave a way out to the ones who were fearful and fainthearted because he did not want those individuals who would not trust in Him, when it came right down to it, to 'poison' the rest who remained who were heroes of faith. God put a pattern in place so the fearful and fainthearted who were not truly trusting in Him would have a way of to depart, and He allowed them to go. Thus they could not poison and contaminate the other true heroes of faith by their fears.

If I were Gideon I might have asked, "What? You are asking me to tell the ones who are afraid to go back home? Pack it up? Not be a part of what we are about to do here and come against our enemies? Send these people home?" Yes. Send them home. In other words, God is saying to Gideon, Just as I laid it out back in Deuteronomy, I am saying do it again. Send the ones that are fainthearted and fearful packing. Let them go home. Don't give them the opportunity to poison the ones that are left. They only had 32,000 soldiers at that time, and that was less than 25% of the enemy force. And now, 22,000 had gone home because they were fearful and afraid! They didn't just leave they left early! And there remained 10,000 soldiers.

Judges 7:3 – Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.

Well God, you are still in control, and you can do more with 10,000 than we could probably do with 32,000! It doesn't really matter if it is 32,000 or 10,000. If you go before us, victory is at hand because you are the Lord God, and you are in control of all things!

Judges 7:4 - And the Lord said to Gideon, the people are yet too many."

Now, I don't know about you, but I would definitely be scratching my head at this point and saying, "That sounds unreasonable!" Yes, the Lord said to Gideon, "The people are yet too many; the 10,000 Israeli soldiers are too many! So, bring them down to the water." What did God do before He got the number of Israeli soldiers He was pleased with, the people who would trust and obey not only Him but also the leadership of Gideon? What did He have them do?

‘ . . . and I will try them for thee there’

‘I will try’ and the Hebrew word used there is ‘Tsaraph,’ to test and to prove to be refined.

Judges 7:4 – And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go.

‘Take them down to the water because at the water I will try them, I will test them, and from that point on, I will know they are refined enough to follow me in whatever direction I take them and be obedient to my Word, and more importantly (because they were following Gideon, and because he was the one communicating with the Lord) will follow your word.’ God puts us in positions, whether you are a leader or a follower, to test you, to try you, to prove you, and to refine you. And He is bringing these 10,000 Israeli soldiers down to the water to test them to see who would make the final cut.

Judges 7:5 – So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.

God is now separating the children of Israel into two groups. When you are ‘lapping’ from your hands, you are on ready alert, and when you are down on all fours and just diving in, you have no concern about what is going on around you. God was not looking for individuals who were more concerned about sucking it all in instead of being on guard, being alert, being ready for battle in a second if need be. He wanted Israeli soldiers who took their calling seriously, and He had Gideon separate these individuals – the one that lappeth the water like a dog, and the one that bowed down on his knees and just dove in and started sucking up the water without any concern of his surroundings. Just imagine what Gideon was thinking when very few people were lapping! Imagine what was going through his mind! OK, here is one that lappeth, but here are ten or twenty who didn’t! Just imagine what was going through Gideon’s mind, “How come there is less lapping the water, and how come there are more of them bowing down?” They bowed down on all fours upon their knees to drink the water. Almost as a sign of bowing down to Baal, once again doing what had brought God to the point of disgust because they never followed His ways, and so easily and quickly followed the enemy’s ways. The enemy’s ways seemed more attractive, and for some reason, Baal worshipping, and Baal following, and following after false Gods always seemed more attractive. Maybe it seemed more attractive because it catered to their flesh more! Serving God doesn’t cater to your flesh as much as serving false gods. *In fact, serving God would never cater to your flesh, but false gods would always cater to your flesh.*

Judges 7:6 – And the number of them that lapped, putting their hands to their mouth, was

three hundred men; but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.

That was how God separated the ones that He knew He could trust to go against the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the enemies of Israel, from the ones that He knew would bail out at the last minute when things started getting rough, who would probably say, you know what, I was in it this far with you Gideon, but this is too close for comfort now. I think I want to head back to the safety of the mountains, and the caves, and the dens. God sorted them out for Gideon. He separated out the 300 that would be faithful and obedient to him and his leadership.

Judges 7:7 - And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place.

They were now down to 300 people. Three hundred people! I have done the statistics on this, and 300 is less than ¼% of 1% in numbers compared to how many of their enemies were lurking out there ready to attack. Let that sink in! In other words, there were 400 Midianites and Amalekites for every Israeli soldier. They were outnumbered 400:1. What if I said to you tonight, “We are going to war, and it’s going to be hand-to-hand combat, and also, it is going to be one person against 400!” You would definitely think I was crazier than a loon, that I have lost my mind! That’s why God had to separate them, because He knew He was asking the impossible for them to believe in. You’ve got to hand it to these 300 – what faithers! To keep marching on knowing they were outnumbered 400:1. It so staggers me I can hardly imagine it, 400:1.

Judges 7:8 - So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

The enemy was arrayed in the valley, ready to attack, and all Gideon had was 300 soldiers. But what a 300! Three hundred soldiers who were sorted out by God because God had tried them, God had tested them, and God had proved what was really in their hearts – whether they would be obedient and faithful when their backs were up against a wall and outnumbered. They were tried, ‘**Tsaraph**’.

What are you facing today? I am sure it is nothing compared with what these people were facing. God’s Word is still true today. He will ‘**Tsaraph**’ you, He will test you, He will prove you to see if you will be obedient and still hang on to everything He has said and promised in this Book for your life. Not so ‘*you could be a better you,*’ as some say, but to see how much of His word you trust, how much faith you have in His Son who went before you to give you hope, salvation, and grace; to allow you to be reconciled back to the Father and to have that wonderful relationship once again. He sent His spirit, His Holy Spirit, to be with us, to comfort us whatever we are facing today, whatever we will be facing this week. God looks upon the heart and He has sorted you out!

He was looking for 300 people in Gideon's time He could trust. God is still looking for people He can trust today.

Judges 7:9 – And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand.

It is amazing to me that Gideon has not asked for a sign at this point. He had asked for a sign when he first met the angel. He had asked for a sign (with the fleece) as he was preparing for battle; but at least he knew he had 32,000 at that time. Now, he has only 300 and he does not even ask for a sign! It was this faith that touched God's heart, I believe, seeing how Gideon had progressed in faith and trust in Him. If I were Gideon I would probably be asking for 2 or 3 signs by now! "From 32,000 soldiers to 10,000 soldiers to 300 soldiers – sure God, you sure have things under control! We are losing soldiers, and we have not even begun fighting yet! You had better send me a sign O Lord, and it better be a good one, because what I see right now is not very encouraging." But Gideon had progressed in his faith toward God, and I believe God was so pleased by Gideon's faith that He had compassion on him. He realized that Gideon was beginning to trust in Him totally and unconditionally.

Judges 7:9 – And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand.

Now, this is a commandment from the Lord to Gideon. "Arise; get thee down unto the host." He is not saying to Gideon, "Well, if you like you can go down there." He is saying, "Arise, get thee down to the host for I have delivered them unto thy hand." And this is where God's compassion is so wonderful; He allowed Gideon to take his servant Phurah with him because he was afraid.

Judges 7: 10-15 - But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: And thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host. Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed men that were in the host. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude. And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

Barley always represented the least and lowest, and was a classic symbol of the low-class sustenance in the Israeli food menu. So, the dream basically indicated someone of low stature was tumbling into the host of Midian and 'came unto a tent and smote it that it fell and overturned it that the tent lay along.' Now, the Midianites were dreaming a dream, and they were interpreting the dream also! Though Gideon had not asked for a sign, this dream was given to him as a sign,

as hope of this to come shortly.

Judges 7:16 – And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers.

These are their battle instructions now! You probably wonder why he was to get a trumpet, an empty pitcher, and a lamp or torch within the pitcher. Basically, the torch or lamp was fuelled by some type of fuel, and given enough fuel the torch would not burn out inside the pitcher but could be covered up so nobody else saw it giving out light until the right time. They also had a trumpet, so they had a trumpet in one hand and a pitcher with a torch in another. There is no mention of any other weapon because the children of Israel had no other weapon! The Midianites, Amalekites, and children of the East were tormenting them and everything was stripped from them including their weapons, their swords, and their knives. They were not allowed to keep any weapons. The Amalekites and the Midianites controlled the children of Israel by taking everything they had from them, including their weapons, so they would not be a threat to them when they came periodically to rape and plunder the land of the harvest and claim their livestock as their own. Therefore, the only things the Israelites had with them were the torch, pitcher, and trumpet. Doesn't sound like much of an arsenal to go and get your enemy! Not when you only have 300 soldiers to begin with to overcome approximately 135,000 enemy soldiers, and you don't even have one sword. You have nothing except the pitcher, a lamp, and a trumpet; not one sword, not even a dagger!

Judges 7:17,18 – And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, *The sword* of the LORD, and of Gideon.

The 'sword' is printed in italics here to indicate it is not included in the original. The verse should read here, "and say, 'Of the LORD, and of Gideon.'"

Judges 7:19 - So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.

They went up to the hilltops, surrounded their enemies, and all 300 of them blew their trumpets simultaneously. Why did they do that? Imagine the echoing that was going on in that valley in the middle of the night – it would not have sounded like 300 men! Imagine what these Amalekites and Midianites were thinking when they heard the trumpets of, what they thought at the very most, 32,000 men. I am not sure if the Amalekites and Midianites knew that the Israelites had been reduced to 300 men. I wouldn't be surprised if they knew since they probably had spies in the camp. "Hey, 31,700 went home. They are only left with 300. This is going to be a walk in the park. Yes, we might lose a few lives, but at the end of the day, this will be a total wipe out of these Israelites." No! Here are 300 trumpets, all simultaneously blowing at the same time. I just imagine

God adding His echoing voice to it so that the 300 sounded like 3000 trumpets! Even if it did not sound like 3000 trumpets, still when you went to war, one trumpet sound meant one company of men. So imagine what 300 trumpets would have meant to the Midianites below in the valley. If one trumpet meant a company of men, what can 300 trumpets mean? They were brought to confusion by God's master plan. God was saying to Gideon, "Do you know the weapons you have Gideon? They are just your everyday household items – a pitcher, a torch, and a trumpet. So basically, Gideon's army had 300 trumpeters who went around carrying 300 pitchers with torches inside it. With God on their side, the Israelites did not need any weapons they had the victory!

Judges 7:20 - And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon.

Now the 'sword of the LORD' comes into play in this verse, 'The sword of the LORD and of Gideon! So now Gideon with 300 trumpeters, who had 300 lamps, surrounded the enemy camp and caused confusion because, obviously, their enemies thought they were now the ones being outnumbered, that there were probably a lot more Israeli soldiers than was expected by the enemy.

Judges 7:21 - And they stood every man in his place round about the camp; and all the host ran, and cried, and fled.

The enemies were running for their lives. What a picture!

Judges 7:22 - And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host:

They didn't even have to do anything at this point. The enemy turned on themselves. The Amalekite versus the Midianite versus the children of the East – all battled among themselves; killing themselves off because of the confusion. They did not know who was who, there were too many of them, like grasshoppers for number! God confused them. They thought they were outnumbered and turned on each other thinking they were the enemy. God is wonderful in His deliverance!

When we are tried, we shall receive the crown of life

God had a plan for His creation but the devil interrupted that plan by introducing sin and temptation into Adam and Eve's life. Just when the devil thought he had God's creation doomed because of Adam's sin, God, in His mercy, sent forth His Son, in His set time, to steal the keys of death and the grave from Satan and give us eternal life. God sent Joseph to be tested and tried

to see if he would be obedient to carry out His purposes. God needed someone He could trust; someone who would not be influenced by the riches and lifestyle of the Egyptian culture, and who would not fall in love with the high position he had but understand and realize that he had been put there by God to serve His ultimate purposes. God had to **'Tsaraph,'** put the iron into Joseph's soul to test him, prove him, refine him, and separate him out like silver is separated from ore and lead through the heated furnace of the fire. Gideon and the 300 also had to be tested, proved, and refined to see if they would be obedient even when they realized that there were only 300. They had to come to the point where trusting God, would be enough to overcome any enemy they were facing.

The hindrances we face in our daily lives today are probably put there by Satan to see if we will fall away from following God. How many of you are willing to join the Gideon camp and say, "The sword of the Lord?" What does the sword of the Lord mean to us today? God's Holy Word –The Bible – is the sword of the Lord. In Ephesians 6, one of the weapons we have to fight against our enemy is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The Bible is the 'sword of the Lord.' God is looking for people today who will take up the sword of the Lord and say, "The sword of the Lord and of . . . (your name)." I am claiming it for myself tonight, "The sword of the Lord and of Joseph." Claim it for yourself tonight. Be obedient and faithful even though it looks like you have been outnumbered. With Jesus Christ on our side the enemy does not stand a chance. He is already defeated! Jesus Christ made sure of that on the cross. Now we just have to be faithful and obedient servants who will follow His ways and not be tempted and led astray by the false gods the prophet proclaimed back in Judges 6:8-9. Who are we going to follow – the ways of the world or the ways of the Lord? Who are we going to follow – the Christian pretenders or the ways of God? Can you proclaim tonight, "The sword of the Lord and of . . . (your name)? Personalize it! I am personalizing it for myself – The sword of the Lord and of Joseph! We will be victorious as long as we keep our sights and our focus on Him and His word; declaring that we will trust and be obedient; declaring that we will not lose our focus but stay faithful to the calling He has in our lives, in whatever capacity He has called us to follow Him now.

God will test you. Don't think it strange, as Peter said, concerning the fiery trial you will go through. God will test you just like He tested Gideon. May not be in the exact same circumstances and the same way, and obviously not so drastic in most cases. But He will test you

to see what you are made of; whether you will trust Him or not, whether you will be obedient to Him or not, and whether you will be faithful to your calling or not. He is looking for servants who will proclaim, "The sword of the Lord and of . . . (your name)! In this case 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.' Personalize what they said and put your name on it, "I am going to be faithful to His calling, and whatever our enemy throws at me I will be faithful until that day."

Understand that the '**Tsaraph**' in your life has to take place so He can separate you just like silver is separated from lead. He will refine you, as silver is refined because He wants to separate you out for whatever purpose He has in your life, for the cause of Christ. That is what '*taking up your cross*' is all about! Taking up your cross is not about struggling with your own personal sufferings. 'Taking up the cross' is about what you are going to be put through for the cause of Christ. There are plenty of other scriptures about how God is present in your sufferings and how He will comfort you through them. But you have to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Christ. When you take up your cross for the cause of Christ, you are declaring that you are going to be an instrument to get the Word out to others. This is what the enemy hates to see happen! In the spiritual sense, our enemy is far more ferocious than the Midianites or Amalekites, and he is out to destroy you if you support a ministry that is getting the job done the Lord's way.

I pray for you daily, that you remain faithful and able to stand. Personalize it for your pastors and teachers daily and say, "The sword of the Lord and of . . . (pastor's name)." Also, personalize it for yourself and say, "The sword of the Lord and of . . . (your name). God is looking for faithfulness to Him and His Word. He has not changed since Gideon's day; He is still looking for it today." You get imputed righteousness through faith and not by anything you can do for yourself. God does it because of your faith; He imputes you with righteousness. Righteousness is one of the gifts of the Spirit. Righteousness is given only by faith. God was looking for faith in Gideon's day. That is why He was compassionate to Gideon by showing him the last and final sign – the dream and the interpretation of the dream – even though Gideon did not ask for any sign.

The Lord was looking close; He had his microscope focused on Gideon and those 300. He was just looking for one unfaithful servant – imagine the pressure on those 300. Imagine the pressure

the 300 were under once God had separated them, tested them, tried them, and refined them. No more signs were needed though God gave Gideon one more. That is how wonderful our Lord is! We don't need signs any longer since we have the ultimate sign, Jesus Christ, and what He did for us. No matter what Satan throws at us now, we know we have the gift of Salvation through faith forever. That is the only sign we need. To stay in faith you have to live a life of faith; you have to focus on His Word and be faithful to it. Then, you too can say, "The sword of the Lord and of . . . (your name) tonight!" I am claiming it for myself, "The sword of the Lord and of Joseph." And our enemies will have to watch out because with the Lord on our side, who can be against us? Who can be successful against His purposes? When you remain faithful to His word – they don't stand a chance and they are no match! Claim His promises knowing that Jesus Christ will never leave us nor forsake us. We just have to go out there in faith and say, "The sword of the Lord." We can claim that because we are on the Lord's side, and He is on ours. Keep on Faithing soldiers of Jesus Christ!

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